

B-D Working Group
Draft Meeting Record
Thursday, September 17, 2015
Butte-Silverbow Archives
1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

BDWG Members Present: Tom Rice, Maureen Connor, Tony Colter, John Kountz, Leonard Wortman, Rick Sandru, Nathan Korb, Dave Schulz, Mark Thompson

Guests/Partners: Spenser Merwin, Nick Jose, Nick Gevock, Darcie Warden, Bob Zimmer

Forest Service: Scott Snelson, Alex Dunn

National Forest Foundation: Karen DiBari (facilitator), Zia Maumenee, Adam Liljebblad

Meeting Objectives:

- Develop filters for 5 YAP for integrated restoration projects on the BDNF
- Update on Boulder Lowlands and discussion of scoping comments

1. Welcome, introductions and approve minutes

- People introduced themselves around the table.
- Karen DiBari explained the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) process for bringing in new members: 1) invitation to attend a meeting and meet the group, observe how the BDWG operations; 2) review of BDWG Operating Protocols; 3) if prospective member is interested in serving on the BDWG, that person is asked to write a short email letter explaining what he/she brings to the group and why interested in serving; 4) BDWG decides on membership.

2. Public comment

No public comment.

3. Updates/ Announcements (*5 minutes*) (*Dave Schulz/Tony Colter*)

- Dave Schulz reported that the Montana Association of Counties (MACo) has a subgroup formed to Secure Rural School (SRS) funding for replacement of revenues from forests. Carol Brooker of Sanders County is very involved. The Forest Counties Coalition is organized under the MACo umbrella. John Hagenruber is a Forest Service (FS) liaison to the state and is involved with the counties as well. Counties created an MOU between MACo and FS that encourages an open dialogue. Regional Forester Leanne Marten will be on a panel in Missoula in the coming week about the need within rural counties for continuation of the SRS program.
- Sun Mountain Lumber laid off 50 employees. Challenges to the timber industry are: 1) Softwood agreement with Canada is about to end and Canada lumber will flood the market; 2) Montana mills have to haul supply logs long distances making the economics marginal; 3) Housing starts are up but demand isn't enough and market is very bad.
- Golden Sunlight laying off 140 employees. Open pit operation is shutting down. Underground operation is still going. Mill will keep going to process ore. Exploration is still going. Reprocessing of tailing piles will still happen.
- Corn and wheat are taking a hit and feeder calf market has gone down. Commodities are highly volatile. Suggestion that the BDWG delve deeper into range management issues and not just focus on forest management issues. This was received positively by the BDWG.
- **ACTION:** Proposal for a future meeting: have range managers from the FS present to the BDWG. What does the group want to know?
 - Overall view of the grazing program.
 - Historical content and maps would be appreciated.
 - Other benefits of rangeland management (wildlife).

- Update on the status of multistate/multiagency sage grouse amendment. Info is available on line. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is lead agency due to them having the majority of the ground on which sage grouse live. This amendment process creates a set of new standards on BLM and FS ground. It is not spatially going to affect a huge portion of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF). Livestock affects sage brush. Idaho and WY will be mostly affected. The timing is imminent. Governor Bullock is working with BLM to adjust the restrictions.
- Controlling noxious weeds is a continuing problem and needs more attention. An all-volunteer effort to spray allotment in the Ruby Valley has been very successful. They have had trouble gaining funding to spray the public land portions. There is money to support the collaborative, but not for actual spraying.

4. Policy Updates

Spenser Merwin reported:

- Congress is back in session. Continued attention is on the fire budgeting issue. The House Bill ends fire borrowing and proposes that the FS pay 70% of the amount of fire suppression costs averaged over the prior 10 years, then the Federal Emergency Management Agency budget pays for suppression after that.
- The delegation is working with Governor Bullock to resolve the grounding of Montana state helicopters.
- Land and Water Conservation Fund set to expire at the end of the month.
- Likely will be a continuing resolution for the federal budget.

Report from Melany Glossa (read by Karen DiBari from an email):

- Scale of burned acres on the forest: 6,000 acres.
- Cost is not possible to get an accurate estimate because it is a national budget item. Unquantified costs result from shifting staff from regular duties to fire. May take a month to see the effects on the program of work.

Discussion:

- Explanation of fire borrowing: all funding in any FS program that is not obligated is re-purposed to fire suppression. This means that funding for weeds, watersheds, and other programs is devoted to fire.
- Other impacts of fire season: majority of FS staff go on fire duty, so work is interrupted and does not get completed. Private conservation dollars are also lost as match since projects aren't getting done.

5. Boulder Lowlands update with BDNF and identification of next steps

- Update from Melany Glossa and Bruce Higgins (sent via email): Draft Bio assessment submitted to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The interdisciplinary team is hoping to have USFWS concurrence by end of next week. Archeological/cultural report submitted to SHPO (Heritage Office) September 18th. Both concurrences must be complete for the Decision Memo to be signed by Melany Glossa. The scenery concurrence is to be completed by next week. Timing may be pushed out a few weeks, but signing is probably not that far off.

6. Review of "BDNF Resiliency Criteria"

An ad hoc committee of Tony Colter, Maureen Connor, Nathan Korb, Scott Snelson and Alex Dunn met to discuss developing criteria to help filter projects/areas through and identify priorities for integrated restoration projects on the BDNF. Tony Colter set the context for the discussion and reminded the BDWG members that the group has been wanting to:

1. Understand how projects/areas are prioritized on the BDNF;
2. Work on a landscape-scale, integrated project (though the BDWG is willing to try a different approach than one big Environmental Impact Statement as long as an integrated landscape vision is created);
3. Clarify how the BDWG can work with the Forest Service to advance integrated restoration on the forest.

The ad hoc committee discussed the new strategic plan and ensuring that the criteria feed into the key components of it as well. The BDNF has a subgroup within their Forest Leadership Team that is working on prioritization criteria, so this is a great opportunity for the BDWG to provide input into their discussions. Desires for the prioritization tool are:

- Clearly articulate how areas are prioritized for project work on the BDNF;
- Identify a 5 year program of work and strategy for improving resiliency on the forest;
- Create a “wish list” of work so that if resources became available, the BDNF would have a plan for how to use additional funds (though the group discussed the challenges of a big, short-term influx of funds vs. the addition of longer-term capacity (“glide path up and glide path down”))

Group discussion:

- Align criteria with integrated resource restoration targets (IRR), Farm Bill, and other internal FS requirements to maximize mutual alignment and benefit.
- Keep it simple and focused on resiliency
- Recognize that conditions on the ground have changed even since the BDWG identified the seven priority landscapes for recommendation under the Farm Bill.
- General agreement that the IRR targets should be the primary filters, and that they could be simplified further

ACTIONS:

- Tony Colter will circulate by email the revised document. He asked that BDWG members send him comments by the end of the day on Friday so that he could incorporate them and get a new version to the BDNF on Monday.

7. Selway Meadows update and identification of next steps

- One of biggest concerns was keeping cows on creek because of creek bank damage. Without fencing cows out, there is no point in restoration.
- Fish barrier funding was lost in fire borrowing.
- Important to discuss other resource concerns as well. Irrigation headcut structures are in disrepair and cause significant damage.
- Geomorphic assessment was delayed in fire borrowing, but is rescheduled for October.
- Selway is good example of a smaller, important project, but does it really need to be a full integrated project? Want to see a general plan/timeline to better understand when the individual components will be accomplished.
- Lots of recreation use in the area and if there are fish kills it will trump everything related to agriculture. There should be a public comment period before any fish kills. FS will resend Q&A document they developed to explain the irrigation work to the public.
- FS will figure out staffing assignment to help and then subcommittee will schedule meeting to condense concerns.
- FS wants to get Selway put into queue for projects because of all additional resource benefits.

8. Pintler Face discussion

Large question: What’s the timeline for all 4 different landscapes? Pintler Face is on calendar for landscape scale. Selway CE is on calendar (but there is a question of whether it should be a full, integrated project or primarily focused on the fish restoration aspects). Boulder lowlands CE is on calendar (not landscape). Gravelly is in consideration for environmental analysis process to begin in FY17.

9. Gravelly Landscape Restoration update

No updates. October will have field inventory with May hydrologic sampling. Full working group meeting in Oct or Nov.

10. East Deerlodge: Complaint filed. FS response to complaint in progress and in internal review. Bull Trout notice of intent to sue also provided by same litigating organization. Revised Bio Assmt sent to USFWS.

11. Identify action items and plans for next meeting

- 10/15 Butte Archives. Resiliency filter/planning, project reports, BDWG roles draft document.
- Think about timing for weeds discussion topic. **WHEN WAS GRAZING GOING TO BE ON THE AGENDA?** November/December

12. Member Announcements and Closing

- Update on next steps for new members.
- Group has high degree of internal respect. Appreciate FS increased willingness to work closely together.
- A few months of funding remaining to support facilitation of BDWG.